

FOUNDATIONS

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DEFINITION OF SETTING

Setting, quite simply, is the story's **time** and **place**. Setting can include the locale of the story, the **weather**, the time of day, and the time period (**past**, present, or **future**). One purpose of the setting is to provide **background**- a place for the characters to live and act in. A good setting helps to make the story **real** and believable.

While setting includes **simple** attributes such as **climate** or wall décor, it can also include complex dimensions such as the **historical** moment the story occupies or its **social context**. Because particular **places** and **times** have their own personality or emotional essence (such as the grim wary resolve in the United States after the September 11th attacks), **setting** is also one of the primary ways that a fiction **writer** establishes **mood or atmosphere**.

Typically, short stories occur in limited **locations** and **time** frames, whereas novels may involve many **different** settings in widely varying **landscapes**. Even in short stories, however, readers should become sensitive to subtle shifts in setting for these details about the setting help reveal a **turn in the plot**. Setting is often developed with narrative description, but it may also be shown with **action**, dialogue, or a character's thoughts.

Characters in a story all have to **interact** in one way or another with its **setting**. Setting can often help reveal character traits, and it is one of the primary ways an author establishes the story's **mood**. In some stories, the setting can strongly affect the plot, functioning almost like another character. An example of this is in "A Sound of Thunder" when Eckels notices that he has altered his country's history by simply stepping on a butterfly. The setting is extremely important to the plot and the actions of the characters in this story. More commonly, though, the setting is always there as a **foundation for the story**—illuminating character aspects, influencing **actions**, and helping to set the mood.

Like the other elements of storytelling, creating a setting is a **skill**. To create a believable setting, or one that can make us feel happiness, **mystery**, or **fear**, the writer must select the right **details** or images. Images are words that call forth a response from our senses- sight, smell, touch, hearing, and at times, even taste. When a writer supplies a few right images, (such as the details of the pathway and dinosaurs in "A Sound of Thunder") we, **as the reader**, are able to provide the rest of the scenery. We might draw from our own experience, or we might go beyond our **memory** into our instincts and into the pool of our subconscious. There we will find all kinds of images- of desert islands, palaces, and **planets** where, so far as we know, we have never been. This exercise of our **imagination** is what makes fiction a more personal and mind-enhancing experience than, for all their lazy pleasures, the ready-made images of **movies** and television.

SETTING VOCAB WORDS:

Setting: the time and place of a story

Social context: The significant cultural issues affecting a story's setting or authorship

Mood: The underlying feeling or atmosphere produced by a story